

GRA Contribution to Powers Position Project

ANNEX A

INFLUENCE OF CERTAIN GEOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS  
IN THE RIVALRY BETWEEN THE SINO-SOVIET BLOC AND THE FREE WORLD

During the postwar period 1945-59 the three geographic elements of location, size, and shape appeared to have considerable influence on the relative power positions of the Sino-Soviet Bloc and the Free World. From the standpoint of area on the earth's surface, the conventional view was a concept of two coalitions:

(1) The Sino-Soviet Bloc -- in a unique position of strength because of its great size, its central location in the world's largest land mass, and its compact shape.

(2) The Free World -- handicapped because of its fragmentation yet able to contain the Bloc threat because of its wide dispersal of industrial and military resources and its control of air and sea routes.

The USSR, the dominant partner in the Bloc, was favorably located from the standpoint of defense. Its longest coastline was protected by the Arctic ice. Although its center of power in the European USSR was in an exposed position, the vast trans-Ural area provided space for dispersal of industries. Under conditions of conventional warfare the USSR had proved that it could trade space for time.

The USSR was also favorably located for an areal expansion of its influence, if and when other factors were conducive to such expansion, because it was contiguous to a large number of states that together include a considerable proportion of the earth's population. The defeat

of Germany and Japan left the USSR bordered only by weak or disorganized neighbors; and in a relatively short time the Bloc was created embracing most of these neighbors -- Eastern Europe, mainland China, and contiguous Asian areas. In the Soviet movement outward and in the subsequent holding of neighboring areas within the Communist orbit, the decisiveness of the locational factor -- that is, the proximity of Soviet military power -- was perhaps greatest in Eastern Europe and least in China. It should be noted, however, that in spite of Communist political and ideological offensives in many parts of the world, no noncontiguous countries have thus far been joined to the Bloc.\*

The addition of mainland China to the Bloc established a secondary center of power. Mainland China, because of its vast size and its importance in other respects, has been able to exert considerable independent influence in affairs of the coalition. The Bloc, therefore, is not a unified whole such as the conventional view would imply but is in many respects bipolar. Moreover, the theoretical advantages of compactness and contiguity enjoyed by the Bloc have not been fully exploited. For example, transportation lines connecting the two principal Bloc members are tenuous and poorly developed.

In the face of the threat of Bloc expansion, a Free World coalition developed that had as its three principal features:

- (1) A primary power center in the United States
- (2) A secondary power center in Western Europe
- (3) Forward military bases and positions extending along the

\* Albania, currently the only noncontiguous Bloc member, is an exclave only because Yugoslavia, its Communist neighbor, was expelled from the Bloc.

periphery of the Sino-Soviet Bloc from Western Europe through the Middle East and Southeast Asia to Japan and Korea.

The United States was the main rear base area serving this coalition. Although not so large as the USSR, it combined great continental extent with a long shoreline and favorable location with respect to world sea and air routes. It was sufficiently far away from Eurasia to be immune to Bloc attack and yet able, by virtue of its control of air and sea routes, to support the Eurasian peripheral bases and thus threaten the European USSR -- the vital center of Bloc power. The efficacy of the peripheral positions for Western defense was proved in the cases of Berlin, Greece, and South Korea, but in the case of Vietnam the defense was only partially successful.

During the period 1960-70 it will be necessary to modify the conventional view of the roles of location, size, and shape in the power positions of the two coalitions. This will be especially true in the fields of nuclear-missile warfare, but less true in other fields.

Assuming a state of nuclear-missile stalemate during this period in which the rivalries of the two coalitions continue to be carried on in the political, economic, and scientific fields but with limited local war a possibility, the conventional view of the elements of location, size, and shape will continue to be significant. Other things being equal, it would seem that Sino-Soviet efforts toward penetration could be carried on with greater ease in areas contiguous to the Bloc than in areas remote from it.

With rising nationalism and anticolonialism in the underdeveloped areas, however, and with the continued drive to spread Communist ideology, the Bloc may well attempt a series of leapfrog operations into noncontiguous territory.

Newly independent West African countries or Western Hemisphere countries such as Paraguay and Bolivia, for instance, could become the scenes of intense Bloc-Free World rivalry. Under such conditions, local areal relationships, (as distinct from world-wide areal relationships affecting the two coalitions as units,) would assume increasing importance.

Given continued advances in nuclear and missile capabilities and the development of satellite reconnaissance systems by both sides, the importance of great size and favorable location to a state or coalition of states becomes greatly lessened in a situation of all-out war or preparation for such a war. All parts of the USSR and the United States become vulnerable to missile attack. The Arctic no longer functions as a natural barrier for either side, although its exploitation as an early-warning area becomes an objective of both. Western bases along the Eurasian periphery of the USSR become untenable because of Soviet countering bases, although conventional containment measures along the periphery are still necessary. Under such conditions, submarine launching pads on the high seas or dispersed missile sites in the Southern Hemisphere may become increasingly significant. The time may come, for instance, when an ICBM launched from a site in New Zealand could be effective against a target in the USSR. The seas, which cover about 75 percent of the earth's surface, will take on added importance not only because of their value as dispersal areas for missiles but also as areas of scientific investigation and sources of food. In other words, surface area as such -- anywhere on the earth -- becomes increasingly important as the space for defense and dispersal within the confines of a nation's or a coalition's boundaries becomes increasingly inadequate.